

A N E S S A Y

ON THE

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K

USE AND ABUSE OF SATIRE.

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Eraſmus.

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USE AND A OF SATIRE



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IN the early ages of nations, as in the youth of individuals, before the authority of the judgment is confirmed by the establishment of acknowledged truths, the Passions are ever the most powerful springs of human action. To inflame, appease, or direct them, is the first office of poetic composition, which possesses in its rudest state a strong and extensive influence; since the Pride of human nature always wakeful and jealous is roused by every approach of Praise or Censure. Thus, while the love of Glory is inspired on the one hand by encomiastic songs, the reward of heroism and valour; the fear of Shame is nourished on the other by Sarcasm and Ridicule, the punishment of treachery and cowardice. With the progress of refinement and luxury, panegyric poetry either languishes and disappears, or is forced to derive its subjects from the exploits of distant times. But the variety and caprice of artificial manners, with the consequent deviations from consistency and nature, multiply the objects of Ridicule, and thus, by perpetual exercise, improve and perfect the Satiric Muse.

In this advancement toward perfection, the Forms of Satire are varied as its extent is enlarged, through all the numerous modes of Invektive and Ridicule. The force of Invektive is confined within a narrow compass; it may deter or punish, but will seldom correct or improve; nor can it justly be employed, except against the greater vices, which demand the indignation of mankind. The powers of Ridicule are more extensive and various; through fear

of that contempt, which its louder tones are capable of awakening, it alarms and represses the licentiousness of folly; and by the cheerfulness and urbanity of its milder accents, it attracts the heart, and secures the attention, while it infuses truth into the mind, and exposes the absurdity of falsehood.

The Prevalence of Satiric composition is also further promoted by the gratification, that it offers to our natural love of Superiority, which always looks on with conscious triumph, while the errors of others are detected and chastised. By the skill and address of the Satirist, this invidious principle may be converted into the means of Improvement, and while all listen to the reproof of others, all may be insensibly reformed. Difficult however and dangerous is this office; and as the advantages of Satire are numerous and great, its abuses also are striking and important. If the poet suffer his own reason to be overcome, and himself to be hurried on to the violation of justice by the impetuosity of an unguided fancy, the judgment of others may be dazzled by the brilliancy of his wit, and error be admitted for truth. If Malice or Immorality point the arrows of ridicule, a severe and fatal wound may be given to innocence or to virtue.

There can be few subjects therefore more interesting, than an examination of the sources, from which such different effects are derived, and of the degree of merit due to those compositions, which in nations, where the Spirit of censure is not suppressed by the authority of the government, are both so numerous and so popular: For there is no care or employment of humanity to which Satire does not extend her influence, while She assumes the important characters of the Avenger of PERSONAL misconduct, the Judge of POLITICAL errors, the Guardian of MORALITY, and the Guide of TASTE.

I. 1. To stigmatise the names of those Persons, whose vices or follies, either immediately by their effects, or more remotely by their example are injurious to the happiness of society, is an action both just and patriotic. The instructions of the moralist and the critic would be too often neglected or despised, if there were no executive

executive power, which might punish the violation of their laws. History indeed by delivering down the vicious to perpetual infamy, presents the noblest lesson of morality; but beside that it comprehends only the more important actions, it is rather a caution against future, than a remedy of present evils: whereas by the judicious application of personal reproof the contagion of folly may be prevented, although the infection perhaps cannot be removed. Even in circumstances influenced by the opinions of posterity, Vice may sometimes despise the appeal, or Vanity may hope that the decision will be favourable; but the attacks of present scorn subdue pride and defeat stratagem, and by a punishment, which no one can escape, hold forth a warning, to which all must submit. At the Period of Grecian history, when the union of the Imagination and the Passions, little restrained by philosophy or law, was raised to an height unknown in almost every other country; lyrical Inveective appears sometimes to have supplied the deficiencies of an unsettled legislature. Personal farcasm is also mentioned among those compositions, that were sung at the entertainments of more refined ages to nourish the spirit of valour and of freedom. The unrestrained liberty of the Old Comedy, which introduced living characters upon the stage under their real names and with the addition of a representative mask, appears to the refinement of modern manners to be the excess of licentiousness and outrage: yet it must be allowed to have been not ill adapted to the jealous and turbulent spirit of the Athenian democracy; and while the comic Poets confined their representations to the attack of Ignorance and Vice, they might be ranked in the first class of public Benefactors.

The freedom of Personal attack, that distinguished the Grecian Comedy, was characteristic also of the elder Roman Satire; which being different in form, although the same in spirit, obtained the praise of originality, when cultivated by Lucilius with so much justice and success. The frequent panegyric harangues in the city as well as in the camp, instituted, by a policy almost peculiar to the Roman State, to kindle the flame of patriotism and virtue, would derive new force from this opposite example of personal censure by

* Polyb. Lib. 6. Pag. 495. Ed. Casaub.

public recital, which exposing the vicious to contempt or infamy compleated the measure of judicial retribution. And while the novelties of luxury, and the variations of character introduced by foreign conquest, afforded copious materials for the exercise of personal ridicule, its boldness found ample support in that spirit of equality, which permitted on certain occasions an almost boundless liberty of censure, to the Soldier against his General, and the Slave against his Lord.

The long series of domestic wars, that followed in the Roman State was little favorable to the cultivation of Satire; and at the establishment of a refined and absolute sovereign, the bold air of its first author was exchanged for the delicate pleasantry and artful address that have made the writings of Horace the perpetual object of imitation and applause. Yet even to works of this general tendency, the occasional introduction of known characters gives peculiar force, as they both interest the passions by their familiarity, and convince the judgment by their truth.

Personal Satire has also been successfully directed in all countries against the vain Pretenders to Genius and Learning, who, if they were not rendered contemptible by ridicule, would too often attract the attention, and corrupt the Taste of their Age. By employing irony the most artful, and wit the most acute, against the unnatural and insipid, among his contemporaries, Boileau drew the affections and judgment of his nation to the chaste and interesting productions of Moliere and Racine.

I. 2. Such have been the advantages derived from Personal Satire; but so great on the contrary are the injuries resulting from its misapplication, that the legislature of all nations has been exerted to restrain it. For if They, whose failings were unknown and harmless, be brought forth at once to notice and shame, or if, for the weakness common to human nature, illustrious characters be made

^b Διότι διὰ αὐτῶν τῶν θρασυῶν ἐπιδόξων παλαιὰ καὶ ἐπιχόρια ὄντα Ῥωμαίοις τὴν κέρτονον καὶ σατυρικὴν παιδίαν. Ἐφίται γὰρ τοῖς καταγενομένοις πᾶσι καὶ ἀμείβειν τε καὶ κατασκευάσαι τοὺς ἐπιφανέστερους ἀνδρας, καὶ αὐτοὺς τῶν γραμμάτων. Dion. Halic. Lib. 7. P. 460. Ed. Hudson.

^c Hor. Ep. ad Aug. 150. Art. Poet. 281. Blackstone's Com. Vol. IV. P. 150.

objects of contempt, the triumphs of Vice are promoted by increasing the number of the vicious, and Virtue loses much of its dignity and force, by being deprived of those names, which had contributed to its support. Not less injurious to science is the unjust censure of literary merit, which tends both to damp the ardour of genius, and to mislead the public taste. The most striking examples of the Abuse of Personal Satire are furnished by that nation, in which its freedom was the greatest. The Theatres of Athens once endured to behold the wisest of her Philosophers, and the most virtuous of her Poets, derided with all the grossness of malicious scurrility. Nor has modern Poetry been altogether free from this disgrace. Fortunate however it is, that although the judgment of the weak may be for a time misguided, truth will in the end prevail: The respect and admiration due to the names of Burnet and of Bentley, of Warburton and of Johnson, are now no longer lessened by the wit of Swift, or the asperity of Churchill.

Even where the subject or design is not improperly chosen, abuse may still arise from the Disposition and Colouring of the piece. When bitterness and severity are employed against men, whose failings were venial and light, or ridicule degenerates either into the broad attacks of sarcastic buffoonery, or the unmanly treachery of dark hints and poisonous allusions, not only the particular punishment is excessive and unjust, but also general malice is fostered by new supplies of Slander.

But the abuses of Personal Satire are then most numerous and great, when it is dictated by private animosity. Beside the impropriety in the subjects of the Dunciad, many of the situations in which they are placed, might be censured as uncharacteristic, if the mind were not sometimes averted from the contemplation of them, and criticism prevented by disgust. There are indeed few circumstances, that awaken such poignant regret, as the severe and rancorous invectives, which some of the first names in literature have vented against their enemies. When envious dullness traduces the excellence, to which it cannot attain; or rash impetuosity bursts forth to a general attack on all surrounding merit, we turn away from

from the fight with contempt or indignation : but to behold that wit and genius which had been employed to the fairest ends, unhappily degraded to the meanest of all offices, the gratification of malice and revenge, is at once humiliating to the judgment, and painful to the heart.

II. 1. Nor has Satire been confined to the conduct of Individuals alone, but has been pointed also against those measures of Policy and State, in which the interest of whole Nations is concerned. It is only by the exercise of POLITICAL satire, that the spirit of Jealousy necessary to the support of all mixed governments can be excited, and the general establishment of the constitution protected and maintained. The frequency also of those occasional errors, to which the administration of every state is subject, will be diminished by the fear of that ridicule, which is able both to repel the attacks of violence, and expose the artifices of faction. So intimately however is the freedom of Political Satire connected with the establishment of general liberty, that popular outrage is not less unfavourable to its existence than the extremity of absolute Despotism. During the violence of contending factions, that preceded the subversion of the Roman Commonwealth, it appears to have been almost entirely unknown : the efforts of wit must indeed have been feeble and disregarded, at a period, when Literature had not obtained an universal esteem, and in a nation, where the eloquence of the Orator was at one time drowned by a sedition, at another time overawed by the sword.

The history of free nations exhibits frequent examples of the application of ridicule to the concerns of State, many of which were useful to their own Age, and all may be instructive to Posterity. The Political comedies of Aristophanes present a picture of his nation, too minute to be suspected of falsehood and too interesting to be viewed without pain. In them we behold the representation of a people, at once refined and gross, learned and infatuated ; so fond of humour and ridicule as to permit the boldest attacks upon their favorite follies, yet so deluded as neither to resign nor correct them ;

^a Brumoy's Greek Theatre. General Conclusion.

attentive to Wit and Satire, yet prosecuting, in defiance of both, a war, that could not but end in their destruction.

By the invention of the Art of Printing, the dissemination of Political Satire has been eminently facilitated, and in our own country it possesses an importance as little known to the surrounding nations, as the peculiar privilege by which its freedom is secured. * The establishment of our excellent constitution was considered as imperfect, while restraint was imposed upon the exertion of any voice, by which the spirit of liberty might be awakened. And since the noblest security against sudden and causeless revolutions is that opportunity of calm decision, which is presented to the judgment of a whole country by the free representation of all public events; Political Satire tends, in a no less powerful degree to secure the Government from rebellion, than to protect the people from oppression. Nor are instances wanting of its exercise, which will ever be contemplated with admiration and triumph. The remains of that Fanaticism, which was a reproach to the human character, were dissipated by the wit of Butler; and the delicate pleasantry of Addison was successfully employed in the support of Justice and of Freedom, at the moment of delusion and danger.

II. 2. Yet while the heart of the Patriot glows with rapture at the survey of that Constitution, which allows to every subject the noblest of all privileges; the most painful sensations will often be excited by a view of the Licentiousness interwoven with so fair a system. Instead of the manly ardour of truth and freedom, Satire is too often taught to breathe the furious and baneful spirit of falsehood or sedition. † Even the dignity of that Supreme Authority, which is rendered sacred no less by the peculiar genius of our constitution than by every principle of general policy, has sometimes been exposed to attacks of ridicule equally mean in their form, and pernicious in their tendency. And by the extensive diffusion of Political calumny, a spirit of animosity has occasionally

* De Lolme. Book 2. Chap. 12, 13. On the Liberty of the Press.

† Blackstone's Com. Vol. I. P. 241. Vol. IV. P. 173.

been

been excited, so powerful, as to interrupt the national harmony, and embitter the intercourse of domestic life.

* Moved perhaps by these considerations, Swift, (who had himself been employed on some occasions as the support of a Party, and acting on others from a more enlarged principle, had been hailed as the vindicator of a devoted people) attempted in a relation of fictitious adventures, to stop by the powers of ridicule that torrent of faction, which was at once so impetuous and destructive. Happy would it have been, if the execution had corresponded with the design. But while He exposes the arts and constitution of his Country to contempt, and represents its whole history as a series of actions disgraceful to human nature, the only Political tendency of the most singular production of Genius, is to relax the vigour of Patriotism, and sink the spirits into despondence and inactivity.

III. 1. From this view of Personal and Political Satire, the mind is naturally carried to the contemplation of more general and abstract productions. Of such compositions, the first in consideration and importance, are those, that affect MORALITY. With the accuracy of philosophical truth, with the beauty of reason, or the dignity of virtue, the weak, the gay, and the profligate will be little moved; but Deformity of every kind, when exhibited in its native shape, seldom fails to strike the senses, and rouse the heart to contempt or aversion.

One of the most important objects therefore of Moral Satire, is to render those opinions contemptible by ridicule, of which the falshood may be evinced by argument. There is a darkness, that sometimes overspreads the human mind, which is more easily dissipated by the bright flashes of wit, than by the clear though steady light of reason; for the force of habit can seldom be vanquished, till new passions are roused in opposition to prevailing affections, and prejudice is subdued by shame. The progress of manners among the nations of modern Europe affords striking examples of the

* Voyage to Lilliput Chap. 4. to Brobdingnag Chap. 6, 7. To Laputa Chap 8.

success of Comic Satire. ^h The cloud of errors, with which mankind had so long been oppressed, was first penetrated by the wit of Erasmus; the pleasantry of whose irony prepared the mind for the reception of those just ideas, that have since been made the basis of Religious institutions. Still more extensively successful was the original and unrivalled humour of Cervantes. ⁱ No sooner had his extraordinary Satire appeared, than the romantic fabric of pernicious enthusiasm, that had been raised upon the ruins of ancient Chivalry, faded away before it; like the works of its own enchanters, when approached by the Spirits of light. It is also principally by the powers of Comic Satire, that the dark and tremendous illusions, generated by the gloomy spirit of northern superstition, have gradually been expelled; that the absurdity of extravagant systems or visionary mysteries has been detected and discountenanced; and the judgment of mankind enlightened by the influence of reason and of truth. Even the first principle and foundation of all morality has sometimes been protected by the exertions of Wit. ^k In "the argument against abolishing Christianity" the Irony of Swift is happily employed in exposing the madness of scepticism and infidelity.

But Satire has been more frequently exerted against those common follies, by which domestic life is rendered uneasy, and the happiness of society disturbed. To chastise the numerous absurdities of Vanity and Caprice, protected by their minuteness from the severity of Philosophic disquisition, has ever been the favorite object of Comedy: But the peculiar nature of dramatic representation, leaves ample room for those shorter essays of Wit which are the most popular compositions of every people, and are so eminently adapted to the conveyance of general instruction. This end is perhaps no where more happily pursued than in the writings of Horace; but the period of Roman refinement was short and transitory; and the superiority of modern nations in all the elegancies of Morality has been received in a great degree

^h Moriae Encomium. Particularly the conclusion. Of the Colloquies; Virgo Merope Abbas et Erudita; et Peregrinatio Religionis Ergo.

Jortin's Life of Erasmus. Vol. I. Page 113.

ⁱ Beattie on Fable and Romance. Page 562.

^k Johnson's Life of Swift. Vol. 3. Page 393.

through the medium of those Satirical productions with which all of them abound. ¹ This nation in particular will always recur with gratitude to the fortunate period, in which propriety and elegance of manners were so successfully inculcated by the humour of Addison and Steele. ^m And since to the happiness of original invention, to the warmth of Fancy, and the brightness of Wit, that characterise the Rape of the Lock, a most refined and delicate Moral is everywhere united, this beautiful Poem may justly be considered as one of the most useful productions of the Satiric Muse. By such compositions the Judgment is improved, while the heart is softened; and a ray of cheerfulness is cast over the Imagination, that brightens all the prospects of humanity.

A bolder air of Ridicule, and higher colouring must also be sometimes adopted, to exhibit in their native Deformity the more dangerous illusions of Folly, which attract by the appearance of imaginary delight. In this mode of Satire the comic genius of our country has been eminently distinguished. By the Author of "the Universal passion" the greatest acuteness of Wit is joined with the utmost purity of Sentiment, in rendering contemptible all those varieties of Character, that are assumed by Vanity, from the expectation of Importance. ⁿ And the accurate pictures of destructive follies delineated by the pencil of Hogarth, (where poignancy of ridicule is so happily improved by the interesting form of dramatic exhibition), afford the most striking and powerful incitements to virtue and to truth.

To guard the heart from Vice, our fears are to be alarmed, or our passions inflamed; and the pleasantry of Wit and Humour exchanged for Sarcasm and Invective. Modern nations are not without examples of this severer Satire, which the moralist will regard with approbation. Its perfection however must be sought in the compositions of the Illustrious Roman, who living in an age the most corrupt, that history records, attacked the degeneracy of his countrymen with that manly warmth of contemptuous indignation, which was suited to the enormity of their

¹ Johnson's Life of Addison. Vol. II. Page 350.

^m ——— of Pope. Vol. IV. Page 189.

ⁿ Walpole's Anecdotes. Gilpin on Prints.

crimes. In a state of manners so universally depraved, the censure even of Juvenal was perhaps ineffectual and vain. But the modern reader, who turns from the dark picture with trembling and abhorrence, while he congratulates himself on the happy improvements in morality, which seem to assure him that some parts of the description will never again exist, cannot fail to guard with jealous attention against the approach of other Vices, by which human nature may at all times be overcome.

III. 2. In proportion however as the effects of General Satire are powerful and extensive, its misapplication is peculiarly injurious to Morality. ° Error must almost unavoidably be produced, whenever Ridicule, instead of being employed to expose falshood, shall be adopted as the Test of truth. It is the characteristic quality of Ridicule, to compose images of absurdity and extravagance by the unexpected union of dissimilar ideas. Hence arises an opportunity of much fallacious sophistry: for by a constrained association of incongruous parts, or an unnatural distortion of consistent ones, the fairest and best proportioned object may be made to appear irregular and deformed. Weak indeed must be the cause of the philosopher, who is forced to appeal to the passions or the fancy in cases, where the judgment alone is able to decide. But it is melancholy to reflect that falshood and irreligion should sometimes have been imbibed from those Satirical productions, of which the meanness ought to have been regarded with contempt, and the malice with detestation. Indeed Ridicule can seldom be applied to Religious speculations without danger to Morality, however pious may be the intention of the Satire; since the mind is thereby taught to regard those subjects with levity, which ought only to be contemplated with awful veneration.

But Speculative morality is examined by few; and Satire is therefore more extensively pernicious, when it is improperly directed against the actions and conduct of Life. By the petulance of spleen, or the partiality of bigotry, the whole body of a society, profession, sex, and even nation, has sometimes been treated as a single indivi-

° Browne's Essay on Ridicule, in answer to Shaftesbury on the Freedom of Wit and Humour.

dual, and involved in general and undiscerning obloquy. The tendency of such calumnies is to contract alike the judgment and the affections, and thus to limit the influence not only of truth and reason, but also of benevolence and humanity. Satire is also improperly exercised by those Authors, who moved by some particular examples of Vice, from which no period is free, represent the general state of manners as eminently debased, and declaim against the corruption and depravity of their times. ^p When it is considered that such representations have prevailed at every period in the progress of manners, from ages of rudeness to those of civilization and refinement, they may not unjustly be supposed to proceed rather from envious or undiscerning partiality, than from rational and honest indignation. And their tendency is eminently pernicious. Vice will always derive encouragement from the popularity, which exempts it from Shame, and the activity of Virtue will be relaxed by the removal of its most powerful incentive, the hope of approbation and reward. Still more pernicious are those compositions, in which human nature is made an object of reproach, and the passions, opinions, and actions, of Man are held forth to contempt and abhorrence. It is painful to mark the errors of *Genius*; yet the same work of *Swift*, which has already been considered as erroneous in a Political view, is liable to still greater objections in its relation to Morality; and *Boileau's* "Satire on Man" cannot but be regarded as no less injurious to virtue, than inconsistent with the general humanity of its Author. By reflecting upon the Dignity of human nature we are elevated to sublimity, and by contemplating its virtues we are softened to benevolence; but when Man is beheld in a state of Folly or Debasement, the Soul feels an involuntary depression, and sinks into meanness or misanthropy.

IV. 1. Similar to the influence of comic Satire upon Morality is its connection also with TASTE. Critical as well as moral truth can seldom be perfectly established, unless the absurdity of error be exposed by ridicule. To develop the latent arts of composition, and, by proving their conformity with the principles of human nature, to erect taste on the basis of Science, is the work of Philoso-

^p Harris's Philological Enquiries. Concluding Chapter.

phy alone. But scientific arrangements are little calculated for general use : While therefore the Rhetorician exerts his eloquence to ravish and transport the mind by displaying the successful efforts of Genius ; the Satirist on the contrary employs his Wit, to detect errors and discountenance absurdities, and thus provoke his audience to aversion or contempt. And since false opinions must necessarily be extirpated before just ideas can be introduced, Satirical criticism will always, in point of popular instruction at least, be prior to Philosophic. The turgid, the gross, and the unnatural must be despised, before the sublime, the witty, or the beautiful can be truly relished. So that, while Satire appears to be confined to the lower objects of Criticism, it contributes in an eminent degree to the promotion of the highest ; and prepares the understanding for those refined and elevated sensations, which the perfect comprehension of excellence can alone produce. The Critical Satires of Horace, although composed with a view to the particular situation of his Country, contain so many general principles of Philology, so happily illustrated that from Them modern nations imbibed the first tincture of correct and elegant Taste. Nor can the true and natural beauties of composition ever cease to be relished, so long as regard be paid either to these genuine effusions of Wit, or to their happy imitations and improvements in the writings of Boileau and Pope. In a field so ample and interesting as Taste, comic Satire may be supposed to have exerted itself with peculiar felicity : and accordingly we find, that neither the insinuating pleasantry of ^a Erasmus, nor the lively wit of ^r Hall, neither the cheerful humour of ^r Addison, nor the more severe irony of ^r Swift, are at any time so happily employed, as in exposing those literary errors, by which the dictates of nature are violated, and the forms of composition are disgraced. The perfection indeed as well as the true relish of every imitative art has been promoted by the exertions of Wit ; for every thing, that either falls below or exceeds the Majestic Simplicity of Nature, whether it arise from the deficiency or perversion of Genius, is the proper object of Satirical Criticism. To it, one art in particular, the peculiar

^a Ciceronianus. ^r Hall's Satires. Book I. B. 2, Sat. 1. and B. 6. ^{*} Essays on Wit.
^r Treatise on the Art of Sinking.

boast of this country is eminently indebted. The quaint and unnatural affectation, that had corrupted the genuine beauties of rural scenery was exploded by the ridicule of "Pope; and the national attention thus happily directed to the chaste and elegant designs of Kent, Burlington, and Browne.

If we descend to the minute particularities of domestic elegance, (which though of little independent consequence are yet rendered interesting by their connection with more important concerns) we shall here find Satire perpetually employed with advantage and success. The efforts of Ridicule co-operated in a powerful degree, with the gradual progress of Taste, in diffusing that general air of delicacy, by which the enjoyments of social life have been extended and refined. Even after the general principles of Taste have been established in any country, caprice and affectation would introduce perpetual corruptions, were ridicule not employed to withstand their attempts.

The abstruse severity of the Sciences, which must always depend upon the understanding alone, and can derive little aid from the passions or the imagination, naturally excludes Satire from any immediate share in their promotion. Yet ridicule may be considered as advantageously employed, when it has contributed to disgrace the frivolous pretensions that have sometimes dignified themselves with the name of Science and laid claim to its honors and rewards —

IV. 2. In its relation however to scientific pursuits, Satire, instead of confining itself to the vain and superficial, has too often attacked the useful and profound. The researches of the Antiquarian and the Philosopher have been represented as the labours of dullness, to which sense or genius could never condescend. It is impossible to consider without indignation, that at the first institution of that Society, which has contributed so much to the promotion of Philosophy and the advancement of our national honour, all the powers of Wit and Satire were employed to insult and debase it. But the attempt degraded only its authors: and so extensive has been the

" Guardian. N^o. 173. and Epistle to the Earl of Burlington.

diffusion of literary intercourse, that few remains of this contracted spirit can now be found.

By the same vain and undiscerning petulance the labours of the Grammarian and the Critic have been derided, and all the more severe and abstruse parts of literature have been condemned as useless or absurd. The immediate operation of such censure furnishes Indolence with excuse, and Folly with encouragement; and if it were capable of any permanent and remote effect, it must infallibly destroy that Elegance, which it pretends to establish. The embellishments of learning can only subsist, while its strength and vigour are maintained; if the support of reason and philosophy be withdrawn, National Taste must soon sink from its purity, and relapse into extravagance and barbarism.

Even the divine effusions of genius and imagination have sometimes been attacked, and ridicule has been employed to debase the lofty, or vilify the noble. Of such Satire however, as it can only proceed from the utmost perversion of taste, and has always been received with indignation, the instances have been rare, and the attempts altogether fruitless. * The attack made by Perrault upon the chaste productions of Antiquity is remembered only as an object of contempt.

From this general representation of the good and ill effects of Satire, we may be enabled to form a comparison of their respective importance. By the improper exercise of Satire; individuals have sometimes been exposed to undeserved contempt; nations have been inspired with unjustifiable animosity; immoral sentiments have been infused; and false taste has received encouragement and support. On the contrary, by the just exertions of Satire; Personal licentiousness has frequently been restrained; the establishments of Kingdoms have been supported; and the Precepts of Morality and Taste conveyed in a form the most alluring and efficacious. The success however of all those productions, that have not been directed by virtue and justice, has been CONFINED and TRANSIENT, whatever

* Boileau's Reflections on Longinus.

Genius or Talents might be employed in their composition; by the wise among their contemporaries they have been disregarded, and in the following age, they have sunk into Oblivion. But the Effusions of Wit united with truth, have been received with UNIVERSAL approbation, and preserved with PERPETUAL esteem: their influence has been extended over nations and prolonged through Ages. Hence perhaps we need not hesitate to conclude, that the BENEFITS derived from Satire are Far Superior to the DISADVANTAGES, with regard both to their Extent and Duration: and its authors may therefore deservedly be numbered among the happiest Instructors of Mankind.

CHARLES ABBOTT, A. B.

CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE.

Oxford. June. 1786.

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